

**Testimony**  
**IN SUPPORT of:**  
**Senate Bill No. 1014 - An Act Concerning A Municipal Election Monitor;**  
**Senate Bill No. 753 - An Act Concerning the Counting of Incarcerated Persons;**  
**House Bill No. 6578 - An Act Concerning Participation in the Electoral Process;**  
**Senate Bill No. 1017- An Act Concerning Election Administration**

March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Dear Senator Mae Flexer (Co-Chair), Representative Dan Fox (Co-Chair), Senator Rob Sampson (Ranking Member), Representative Gale Mastrofrancesco (Ranking Member) and esteemed members of the Government Administration and Elections (GAE) Committee:

Our names are Gemeem Davis and Callie Gale Heilmann, we are the Co-Directors of Bridgeport Generation Now Votes and voters in Bridgeport.

In May of 2020, Bridgeport Generation Now Votes, PT Partners, Greater Bridgeport NAACP, Make the Road CT, and The Council of Churches of Greater Bridgeport formed the Bridgeport Safe Vote Coalition, with the primary goal of strengthening voting rights during Bridgeport's local elections and the COVID-19 pandemic. Alongside the Safe Vote CT statewide coalition, we pushed for expanded absentee ballot access so Bridgeport residents could vote safely from home. Throughout the summer, our members also emailed, called, submitted testimony - and won! - an Election Monitor for Bridgeport during our 2020 general election.

**As you know, our city has a long history of absentee ballot fraud and abuse.** This abuse disproportionately affects some of our most vulnerable residents. Partisan players here exploit the absentee ballot process to target and manipulate our elderly, low-income, disabled, and monolingual Spanish-speaking neighbors for the purpose of monitoring and controlling their votes.

The appointment of Attorney Max Medina by the Secretary of State as Bridgeport's Election Monitor provided necessary oversight and guidance during our 2020 Presidential elections. However, it is well-documented that oversight is most needed during our local primary elections. Bridgeport voters deserve free and fair elections every time we go to the polls. **Passing SB 1041 will fund this position for the next two election cycles in Bridgeport, giving our election officials and our voters the support we need to rebuild trust and restore democracy.** We thank Representative Rosario, Senator Moore, and all the members of our state delegation for recognizing this as a key voting rights issue and making it a priority this legislative session.

In addition to SB 1014, our coalition also supports SB 753 "An Act Concerning the Counting of Incarcerated Persons," which would adjust population data to count incarcerated persons as residents of their last town of residence rather than as residents of the town in which the correctional facility is located. According to the Prison Gerrymandering Project, a system of prison gerrymandering actually causes two groups to lose political power: the urban communities where the people who are incarcerated come from, and the rural communities without prisons. When one legislative and congressional district takes up more than its fair share of political power, residents in other districts are underrepresented and our whole state's democracy is distorted. **This bill would end prison gerrymandering in Connecticut, thereby ending this racist and classist system that defrauds communities across our state of their true political power.**

We strongly support HB 6578, which restores the right to vote to people re-entering their communities on parole without requiring the payment of certain fines. It is well-documented that the criminal justice system in Connecticut is racist. Connecticut's prison population is 42% Black, while Black people comprise about 10% of our state's population overall. **Disenfranchising people on parole sustains a racist system of voter suppression in our state.** While we eventually want to see voting rights restored to all people impacted by the criminal justice system, including people who are currently incarcerated, restoring voting rights to people on parole is an important first step.

We also support HB 6578, but with needed improvement. This bill takes the important step of codifying AVR, as it is happening now at the Dept. of Motor Vehicles, into state law. However, **Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) must be expanded beyond the Dept. of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to other state agencies like the Dept. of Social Services (DSS), HUSKY, Access Health CT, state colleges and universities and other state agencies.** This is a common-sense reform that saves taxpayer money and helps dramatically increase democratic participation.

Lastly, passing SB 1017 is also absolutely necessary so that voters currently qualifying to vote absentee **retain the freedom they had in 2020 to use their town's official, secure ballot drop boxes.** During the 2020 Presidential election, thanks to the expanded access of absentee voting, Bridgeport far surpassed Connecticut's other large cities with a record 72% turnout! Voters we spoke with enjoyed using an absentee ballot from the safety of their home and the convenience of the ballot drop boxes. Our voters are educated and motivated! We just need to create the right environment for full enfranchisement and free and fair elections.

The people of Bridgeport and Connecticut deserve free and fair elections and robust voting rights. It's time to build the expansive, open democracy of which we all can be proud.

Thank you,

Callie Gale Heilmann  
Gemeem Davis  
Bridgeport Generation Now Votes, Co-Directors